

CPC Minutes of August 17, 2010

A regular meeting of the City Plan Commission (CPC) was held on Tuesday, August 17, 2010 at 4:45 p.m. in the Department of the Planning and Development (DPD) 4th Floor Auditorium, 400 Westminster Street, Providence, Rhode Island.

Opening Session

Call to order: Chairman Durkee called the meeting to order at 4:50 p.m.

Members Present: Chairman Steve Durkee, Vice Chairman Harrison Bilodeau, Andrew Cortes, Bryan Principe, Meredyth Church, Samuel Limiadi

Staff Present: Robert Azar

Approval of meeting minutes from July 20 2010: Mr. Bilodeau made a motion seconded by Mr. Cortes to approve the minutes. All voted in favor.

Mr. Limiadi and Mr. Principe respectively arrived at 4:50 & 4:55 p.m.

Providence Tomorrow

1. Downtown Plan - Introduction of the Downtown plan; presented by DPD staff.-for discussion

Mr. Azar presented the highlights of the 12th and final neighborhood plan.

The first seven pages serve as an introduction.

The next section discusses changes, challenges and opportunities in Downtown. There are case studies that illustrate the challenges and a series of transformational projects that illustrate the opportunities.

Plan highlights include:

- The Interstate-195 (I-195) case study shows important changes in land use.
- Land use –Buildings are being demolished to build parking lots.
- 110 Westminster Street is a case that has attracted considerable attention. The former Providence National Bank Building was to be the site of the new 110 Westminster building. The historic structure was slated for demolition on condition that the Weybosset Street façade be preserved and incorporated into the new structure. As financing for the project fell through, the façade has been propped up against a vacant site for over four years. The challenge lies in solving the conflict between preservationists who want to see the façade preserved, business owners who see it as an eyesore and the project developer who is determining suitable development on site.
- The case study on nightlife illustrates the effect of nightclubs on residences and neighborhood public safety. It emphasizes the need to evaluate licensing and zoning.
- Infrastructure Challenges – The parking garage at the train station is owned separately from the station. The city owns the surface plaza, which is deteriorating and affecting the garage below it, with no available funds for repairs.

- Woonasquatucket River – There is a need for dredging due to siltation. Mr. Durkee raised questions about flooding issues, limitations on Water Fire and the challenge of dredging the rivers.
- Page 15: Zoning – Description of zoning regulations
- Page 17: Challenges of development in the West Side Edge.
- Page 20-25: Redevelopment potential of I-way parcels.
- Page 26 Impact of I-195 Pedestrian Bridge on Downtown and the East Side.

Mr. Bilodeau said he was concerned about the name for the Knowledge District. Mr. Durkee said the name should reasonably consider all of Downtown. Mr. Azar said the name is under consideration.

Page 29 of the plan relates to analysis of a streetcar system in the City as an economic development tool and mode of transportation. Mr. Limiadi asked if rails existed underground. Mr. Azar said that there were rails in some areas, but wasn't sure if they were usable. A discussion ensued on the feasibility of a streetcar system.

Mr. Azar described how the plan intends to improve Downtown Circulation around areas like LaSalle, Cathedral and Emmett Squares, improve Kennedy Plaza and listed potential changes to improve circulation. Mr. Principe asked when changes to affect circulation may occur. Mr. Azar said they could happen next year. Mr. Durkee said bids were being solicited. A discussion on the changes ensued.

The state is studying the I-95 viaduct to prepare an environmental impact statement to determine how it should be rebuilt and redeveloped. Mr. Durkee expressed concern about how the viaduct could be improved.

Mr. Azar went on to describe preservation oriented development on page 42 and how it could improve the existing urban fabric for economic development. Potential sites include the gas company buildings on Dorrance Street, 110 Westminster Street and the Arcade, which could be considered a coordinated site to create interesting development.

Mr. Durkee asked the Commission for questions or comments. None were made. He said that the plan was currently a draft and not the final version. He said public comment would be taken in September.

Adjournment

Mr. Cortes made a motion to adjourn the meeting seconded by Mr. Principe. All voted in favor. The meeting adjourned at 5:45.

Respectfully Submitted,



Choyon Manjrekar,
Recording Secretary